

Message Text

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SUBJ: EBAN INTERVIEW ON GENEVA CONFERENCE

SUMMARY: IN DEC 28 PRESS INTERVIEW FOREIGN MINISTER EBAN DISCUSSED US-SOVIET MIDEAST ROLE, CONFERENCE OPENING, DISENGAGEMENT TALKS, SOVIET-ISRAEL RELATIONS, JORDAN-ISRAEL TALKS, SYRIAN PARTICIPATION, PALESTINIANS, UN AUSPICES, AND IMPLICATIONS OF KNESSET ELECTION FOR NEXT PHASE OF CONFERENCE. END SUMMARY.

1. FOLLOWING IS EMBASSY SUMMARY OF DEC 28 EBAN INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY DAVAR CORRESPONDENTS TADMOR AND BLOCH ON GENEVA CONFERENCE AND IMPLICATIONS OF KNESSET ELECTION FOR MIDEAST PEACE PROSPECTS.

2. US-SOVIET MIDEAST ROLE. EBAN SAID THAT AMERICANS AND SOVIETS ARE UNITED AS CO-CHAIRMEN BY THEIR DESIRE TO PREVENT MIDDLE EAST FROM REMAINING WAR AREA AND CAUSING DETERIORATING OF SUPERPOWERS' RELATIONS. BOTH WANT TO DEFUSE DANGEROUS SITUATION CREATED BY UNCLASSIFIED

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CLOSE PROXIMITY OF EGYPTIAN AND ISRAELI FORCES. WAR HAS TURNED CLOCK BACK ON DETENTE. ENERGY CRISIS ALSO HAS HAD MODERATING PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCE ON GENEVA CONFERENCE.

3. GENEVA CONFERENCE--OPENING PHASE. EBAN SAID THAT OPENING SESSION HAS CREATED UNPRECEDENTED ATMOSPHERE OF EXPECTATION. SEVERE JUDGMENT AWAITS WHOEVER WOULD BE RESPONSIBLE FOR FAILURE OF CONFERENCE. CONFERENCE HAS CREATED NEW FRAMEWORK FOR HANDLING MIDEAST CONFLICT BY LIMITING PARTICIPATION ONLY TO THOSE PARTIES DIRECTLY CONCERNED AND BY ADOPTION OF PRINCIPLE OF CONSENSUS. WHEREAS IN SECURITY COUNCIL ARABS SOUGHT ADOPTION OF ANTI-ISRAELI DECISIONS, PARTIES AT GENEVA ARE SEEKING TO ARRIVE AT CONSENSUS, PROVIDING ISRAEL WITH MAXIMUM DEFENSE AGAINST COERCION.

4. TIMING OF DISENGAGEMENT TALKS. EBAN SAID THAT DECISION TO START DISENGAGEMENT TALKS BEFORE JAN 1 WAS TAKEN IN CLOSED SESSION OF FOREIGN MINISTERS. KISSINGER AND GROMYKO INVESTED CONSIDERABLE EFFORT IN PERSUADING ISRAEL TO ENTER INTO THESE TALKS EVER BEFORE JAN 1. DISENGAGEMENT TALKS ARE IMPORTANT TO EGYPTIANS, SOVIETS AND AMERICANS BECAUSE THEY CREATE LINK IN A CHAIN WHICH PROMISES CONTINUATION OF THE CONFERENCE. EGYPT HAS BEEN CONCERNED BY SYRIAN NON-PARTICIPATION AT OPENING PHASE. JORDANIAN PARTICIPATION ONLY UNDERSCORED EGYPT'S ISOLATION, WITH LIBYA, IRAQ, PALESTINIANS AND OTHERS REGARDING WAR AS PREFERABLE TO A PEACE CONFERENCE.

5. SEPARATION OF FORCES. GENEVA TALKS WILL CONTINUE ON PATTERN ESTABLISHED AT KILOMETER 101. AMERICANS HAVE REJECTED SOVIET ATTEMPT TO INVOLVE THEMSELVES DIRECTLY. GROMYKO HAD TOLD EBAN THAT WITHDRAWAL, MEANING A SERIOUS SEPARATION, NOT JUST WITHDRAWAL FROM WEST BANK TO EAST BANK OF SUEZ CANAL, WAS VITAL FOR PEACE. SOVIETS AND EGYPTIANS WANT A WIDE BUFFER ZONE AND REOPENING OF SUEZ CANAL TO NEUTRALIZE DANGER OF WAR.

6. PROSPECTS FOR ISRAEL-EGYPT AGREEMENT. EBAN SAID THAT GAP BETWEEN ISRAELIS AND EGYPTIANS WAS STILL WIDE. FAHMI WAS NOT ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT ISRAELI DEFINITION OF SUBSTANCE OF PEACE. SINCE EGYPTIANS DO NOT ACCEPT ISRAEL'S PEACE DEMANDS IN FULL, THEY CANNOT EXPECT THAT ISRAEL SHOULD ACCEPT THEIR DEMAND FOR COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL. FIRST DECISION OF NEW ISRAELI GOVERNMENT IN JANUARY WILL BE TO DECIDE TO WHAT POINT IN SINAI ISRAEL WOULD BE PREPARED TO WITHDRAW WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF SEPARATION OF FORCES AGREEMENT--
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AND *HAT WILL BE COUNTER-VALUE DEMANDED. ISRAEL DOES NOT YET KNOW TO WHAT EXTENT AMERICANS WILL TRY TO CURTAIL MOMENTUM OF WITHDRAWAL WHICH SOVIETS AND EGYPTIANS WILL EXPECT.

7. ISRAEL-SOVIET RELATIONS. AT THIS STAGE THERE IS NO POSSIBILITY OF RESUMPTION OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS. THIS WILL BE A REALISTIC SUBJECT ONLY AS A RESULT OF SERIOUS PROGRESS--THAT IS, A "SIZABLE WITHDRAWAL" FROM OUR PRESENT POSITIONS ON EGYPTIANS FRONT. BUT SOVIETS ARE INTERESTED IN MAINTAINING DIRECT TALKS WITH ISRAEL. SOVIET MOTIVATIONS ARE: A) DESIRE TO CONSOLIDATE THEIR POSITION AT GENEVA CONFERENCE; B) LACK OF SOVIET MOBILITY IN PREPARATIONS FOR CONFERENCE WHILE KISSINGER WAS ABLE TO MOVE EASILY ON BOTH SIDES; C) A REMAINDER TO ARABS THAT SOVIETS IDENTIFY WITH THEIR

DEMAND FOR RETURN OF ALL TERRITORIES BUT NOT WITH ARAB PHILOSOPHY OF WIPING ISRAEL OFF MAP. SOVIETS REGARD ISRAEL AS MIDDLE EAST COUNTRY ENTITLED TO LIVE IN PEACE AND SECURITY; D) SOVIETS BELIEVE THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER ISRAEL IN HER PRESENT ISOLATED INTERNATIONAL POSITION--TO HELP ISRAEL REHABILITATE HER POLITICAL POSITION IN WORLD.

8. ISRAEL-JORDAN. EBAN SAID THAT HE HAS NO OBJECTION IN PRINCIPLE TO RIFAI'S PROPOSAL, WHICH CAME AS A SURPRISE, BUT THAT THERE HAD TO BE PROCESS OF CONSULTATION BEFORE ESTABLISHMENT OF ANY WORKING GROUP. ON SUBSTANCE, ONE DID NOT HAVE TO TAKE LITERALLY PROPOSAL TO DISCUSS DISENGAGEMENT OF FORCES. WHAT IS MEANT IS THAT THERE SHOULD BE AN ISRAELI-JORDANIAN DISCUSSION ON AN INTERIM SETTLEMENT WITHOUT JORDAN HAVING TO WAIT IN LINE FOR ITS TURN. IN ANY CASE SETTLEMENT WITH EGYPT ALONE CANNOT BE STABLE FOR ANY LENGTH OF TIME IF IT COMES TO PASS AT ALL.

9. PALESTINIANS. THIS ISSUE PLAYED LESS IMPORTANT ROLE AT GENEVA OPENING THAN ISRAEL HAD ANTICIPATED. CONFERENCE CONSISTED OF REPRESENTATIVES OF STATES, NOT ORGANIZATIONS. JORDANIAN DELEGATION HAD INCLUDED SEVEN PALESTINIANS.

10. UN AUSPICES. SUSPICIONS ABOUT UN AUSPICES HAVE TURNED OUT TO BE EXAGGERATED.

11. SYRIAN PARTICIPATION. IT IS STILL POSSIBLE THAT SYRIANS WILL ATTEND THE CONFERENCE. FOR TIME BEING THEY HAVE NOT ASKED TO CANCEL FACT THAT THEY PARTICIPATE IN GENEVA CONFERENCE.
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12. KNESSET ELECTION. THERE ARE HARDLY APPROPRIATE WORDS TO DESCRIBE HOW FATEFUL ELECTION RESULTS REALLY ARE. VERY THOUGHT THAT BEGIN AND TAMIR (LIKUD) WOULD BE SITTING IN GENEVA, WITH THEIR DOGMATIC ATTITUDE, IS NIGHTMARE FOR ANYONE WHO HAS SERIOUS APPROACH TO CAUSE OF PEACE. ANOTHER DANGER IS THAT PRESENT LEADERSHIP MAY BE HAMPERED BY SUCH A MINUTE DIFFERENCE IN VOTES BETWEEN ALIGNMENT AND LIKUD, WITH NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY (NRP) VASCILLATING BETWEEN THEM, THAT IT MAY BE FORCED TO SET UP IMPOTENT GOVERNMENT. GIVEN VIEWS OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES, LABOR ALIGNMENT MAY HAVE TO SEEK CHANNELS TO LIBERAL PARTY (LIKUD), WHICH IS LESS DOGMATIC THAN NRP IN POLITICAL AFFAIRS.
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